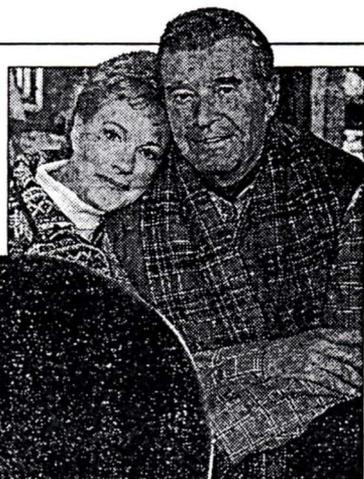


TV Sunday

James Garner has made two classic TV shows and some memorable movies. But what Hollywood will end up remembering him for was his lonely fight against the studios. Before Tim Allen and David Duchovny started suing for their fair share, the man who played Jim Rockford was . . .



Popplin' back . . . Garner is reunited with one of his first co-stars, Julie Andrews, in next Sunday's CBS movie "One Special Night."

The real Maverick

He wasn't bluffing . . . James Garner took a gamble worthy of his cardsharp TV character when he walked away from the classic series "Maverick."

By MICHAEL GILTZ

Tell James Garner that Entertainment Weekly named him one of the century's Top 100 entertainers, and he immediately responds, "Am I ranked 99 or 100?"

Actually, Garner was listed at 97, just above Garth Brooks. But that quick wit and low-key charm have helped keep him on top for 40 years.

His trademark charm is on display next Sunday, when CBS's movie "One Special Night" reunites Garner with Julie Andrews.

to deal with his wife's painful, slow decline from Alzheimer's, when they're stranded for the night in a cabin.

It's really just an excuse to let two old pros go at it again. Watching Garner casually breathe life into this familiar tale it's no surprise that the 71-year-old remains one of the busiest actors around.

And he's also one of the most influential. Jimmy Stewart pioneered the now-common practice of stars taking a piece of a movie's profits rather than a big salary upfront. But James

every other area.

When Bruce Willis walked away from "Moonlighting," he could take solace in Garner's success after leaving the classic TV show "Maverick."

When David Duchovny and Tim Allen claim they've been bilked out of their fair share of a show's profits, they can conjure up the image of Garner successfully (and repeatedly) suing Universal to get money owed to him for "The Rockford Files."

Garner made doing commercials classy with his ads for Polaroid, which teamed

warm that fans assumed they were married in real life.

Heck, Garner's independent ways even signaled the death knell of the movie studios' grip on stars.

"A lot of actors in my day couldn't [defy the studios] because they were afraid they wouldn't work again," Garner says. "When just a few moguls ran it, they could call each other and say, 'Don't hire that son-of-a-bitch.' But that was ending when I sued Warner Bros. over 'Maverick.'"

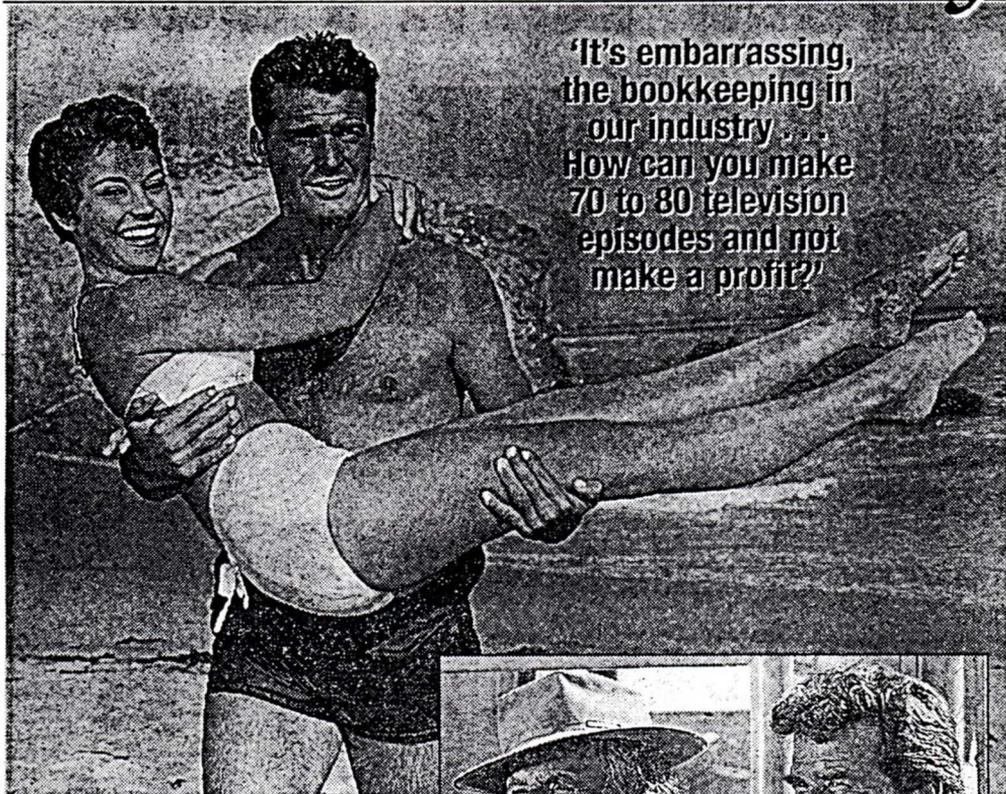
Garner reasoned there were too many independent producers who owed no alle-

Jack Warner. "And once one person hired me, then everyone else said, 'Well, hey, if he's gonna work, we're gonna hire him too.'"

Not that his victory came without a price: Garner left "Maverick" long before that show ran its course. And while studio head Jack Warner wasn't all-powerful anymore, he could still scuttle a film or two.

"The day I got out of court, my agent had a script on his desk from 20th Century Fox called 'The Comancheros.' Garner thought the role was too similar to Bret Maverick. But when Gary Cooper signed on for the lead,

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'It's embarrassing, the bookkeeping in our industry . . . How can you make 70 to 80 television episodes and not make a profit?'

The director wanted him; the studio wanted him. But they never called him back.

"I know what happened," Garner says. "Jack Warner called the producer and said, 'Don't you dare hire him.' If I could have proved that, I'd have owned both studios. But I couldn't, so I never did anything about it."

He made other hits, however, including the box-office smash "The Great Escape" (1963). In contrast to Garner's endless and expensive legal scrapping over TV shows, he saw some of his movies turn a profit.

One of his best films is the comedy "Support Your Local Sheriff" (1969). "I got a profit check from that in four months," Garner says, "and I've been getting profit checks on it ever since."

Things were looking up even more when he returned to television in "Nichols," an offbeat show set at the turn of the century "when the West was dead," Garner says.

It had the quirky charm of "Northern Exposure," with Garner playing a sheriff who never carried a gun. Though ratings were middling (it followed NBC's biggest hit, "The Flip Wilson Show"), the show won a second season.

"But the sponsor Chevrolet didn't like it," Garner says. "One of the wives of the bigwigs saw the show and said, 'That's not Maverick,' and they canceled it. It was pretty stupid."

But he's used to stupidity,

Up in arms . . . Garner and Andra Martin starred in the 1959 Pearl Harbor movie "Up Periscope." Right: "The Rockford Files" TV series — with Noah Berry as his father — spawned a string of movie specials



whether from sponsors or networks. Universal has lost to Garner on several occasions, and he's in the midst of another suit that challenges the way they split up profits from overseas sales.

(Typically, a studio pairs a desirable show like "Rockford" with several losers and forces foreign TV networks to buy them as a package. Profits are spread evenly among all the shows, keeping the big hits from making the money they deserve and easing the red ink on a loser.)

"That's a very tough lawsuit — I don't think I'll win that one," admits Garner, who knows more than he ever wanted to about residual payments and contract law.

"It's embarrassing, the bookkeeping in our industry. I said on '60 Minutes' in 1980 or something like that, 'One of these days, some judge, some jury, is gonna put these people in jail because they're literally stealing from the government and everyone else.' How can you make 70 to 80 television episodes and not

make a profit? You'd be out of business! It doesn't make sense."

He's certainly not surprised to see Duchovny, Allen and others fighting the same battles he won so many years ago.

Artistic victories have also come to Garner. He earned an Oscar nomination for "Murphy's Romance" (1985) and reams of reviewers' praise for his turn in the overlooked drama "Twilight" (1998) with Paul Newman and Susan Sarandon.

TV's been even better, thanks to critically acclaimed hits like the movies "My Name is Bill W," "Breathing Lessons" and "Barbarians at the Gate" — not to mention those "Rockford" movies.

In fact, he's almost never been busier. This year alone he's hosted a 13-part documentary on country music for The Nashville Network, starred in a "Rockford Files" TV movie, appeared in the miniseries "Shake, Rattle and Roll" and filmed a new Clint Eastwood movie called "Space Cowboys" (due out next year).

But some things don't change. His costar in "One Special Night" — Julie Andrews — voiced concern this week that people might not accept her as an actor.

That's exactly the same concern she had when Garner starred with her in "The Americanization of Emily" in 1964.

"She was concerned about it and everyone was," Garner says. "But once I started working with her, I knew there wasn't going to be a problem. In fact,

"Americanization" really helped her to win the Oscar. They gave it to her for . . . for . . . for playing the nanny. What was the picture? 'Mary Poppins.' What happened was 'Americanization' was released, and they saw this lady can act, too."

It's also another movie where Garner went his own way despite the price.

"Kennedy was shot when we were on the set, and I went home," says Garner, despite the studio's express desire not to fall behind schedule. "I went home and got docked a day's pay."